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This appears to be the only photo of the evangelist's tent pitched at Johnson's Corner, near Keene, North Dakota. (circa 1917)



This North Dakota postcard portrays Great-Grandpa Johnny Budd's homestead in McKenzie County, North Dakota. (circa 1914)

The Bible that Wouldn't Burn

BY JOSIE M. BURNS

Four books are stacked on the mantle above the fireplace in my parents' living room. They are very special books, very old and worn from daily use. My great-great-grandmother Steiner's big German Bible bears evidence of her constant devotion. Some of its pages are falling out, and the last Sabbath school lesson she had been working on is still a placeholder for the text. Tucked in its pages are a number of letters written to her daughters—all in German. There's a small German New Testament and another book. But the book that my eyes are always drawn to is the simple, small German Bible, its cover cracked and frayed. It belonged to my great-grandmother Josie. It is precious, handled rarely and only with the utmost reverence and care.

My great-great-grandfather Melchior Steiner was an Austrian Jew from Vienna who emigrated to the United States in 1882. He later found himself in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he met Mary Eggar, an emigrant from Pamhagen, Austria. Melchior, though non-religious, saw something special in this devout young girl with the rosary and they married in 1886.

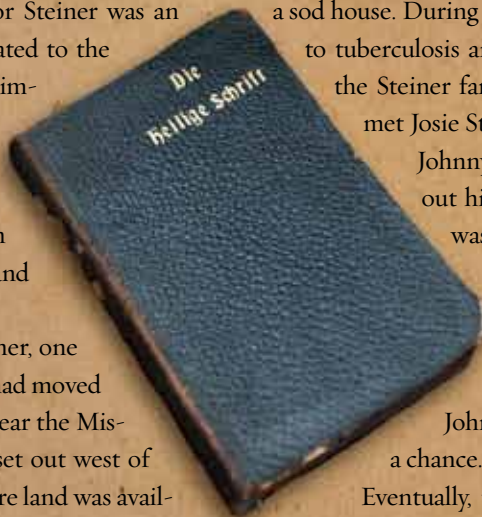
The couple had eight children together, one dying shortly after birth. By 1907 they had moved to McLean County in North Dakota, near the Missouri River. Their oldest son, Joseph, set out west of the Missouri to McKenzie County where land was available. He met up with a Scots-Irish adventurer who worked the ranches breaking horses and cooking for the other cowboys from his chuck wagon. His name was Johnny Budd. Johnny and Joseph homesteaded adjacent land while living in

a sod house. During the summer of 1914, Joseph succumbed to tuberculosis and died. Johnny took his body back to the Steiner family. While at Joseph's funeral, Johnny met Josie Steiner.

Johnny went back to his sod house, now without his friend or any family of his own. Loss was a familiar and uninvited guest to Johnny, who had lost his mother and sister to influenza when he was a boy back in Vermont. Deserted by his father and taken in by a reluctant family, Johnny set out on his own as soon as he had a chance. Alcohol became his only real comfort.

Eventually, the Steiner family moved further west and took up residence at their son's homestead in McKenzie County, which made Johnny and Josie neighbors and a close friendship was formed.

One day, an itinerant evangelist pitched a meeting tent



down the road at what was known as “Johnson’s Corner.” Soon the tent was full of ranchers curious to see what the preacher had to say. Perhaps out of curiosity, or maybe something stronger, Johnny literally stumbled into the tent one day with Josie and her sister, Rosalia. They heard the gospel, the messages of the Three Angels and of Christ’s plan to rescue His people. Johnny felt God rescued him that night, and believed there was truth in the prophecies he heard. Soon the three began attending the meetings regularly. This newfound love for the Scripture was not welcome in Melchior’s home. Josie and Rosalia had to climb out of their bedroom window to hear the truths they thought were presented especially for them. The sisters kept their German Bible tucked away in their dresser drawer.

One day when Josie and Rosalia were out, their father found their Bible and decided he would rid his house of this menacing Word once and for all. In a rage, he took the Bible and threw it into the burning wood stove. Later, when their mother, Mary came to stir the fire, she opened the door and found the Bible intact and unharmed. She called Melchior, and to his horror he realized the Bible remained untouched by the flames. He took the Bible out of the ashes, wiped it off and commanded Hannah, his youngest daughter, to put it back in the drawer. Melchior warned Mary and Hannah not to speak a word of it to anyone, threatening them with their very lives if they did.

New Life on the Prairie

Johnny and Josie married and began sharing the truths they held so dear with everyone they met. They were so eager to share what they had learned that they became colporteurs and traveled by train to Bismarck, North Dakota, and sold the Adventist books they had come to love. They had ten children between 1919 and 1938. They faithfully prayed for each of their children every day and taught them the importance of spending time with God’s Word. Each followed closely in the footsteps of their parents.

It wasn’t until years later that my Grandma Josie learned the story of her precious Bible, which she had kept safe and

close to her heart for so many years. It had accompanied her from North Dakota back to Minnesota, and then across the mountains of Montana and Idaho to where they settled in the Walla Walla Valley, where her precious children could receive a Christian education.

My Grandma Josie passed her love for the scriptures on to each of her ten children, including my grandmother, Hazel. My earliest memories of my grandmother are of crisp winter mornings, long before light. I don’t know why I would awaken so early when staying with Grandma and Grandpa, but I would open the door of my bedroom, the room which had belonged to my father when he was a boy, and quietly tip-toe to my grandparents’ room. There I would find my grand-

mother on her knees. It was a sacred time that I knew not to interrupt. I quietly knelt beside her and attempted my own conversation with Jesus. Sometimes I opened my eyes to notice tears streaming down her cheeks—tears of joy as evidenced by her beaming smile.

When Grandma finished her time in prayer, she gathered me up in a warm blanket and took me to the kitchen to sit on the bench in front of the wood stove with her well-worn and marked-up Bible in hand. As I reflect on the warm images of her stoking and stirring the fire, I realize she was also kindling a fire in me. We’d talk and read the Bible until long after the sun came up. God’s Word became as precious to me as those times we spent together.

When my Grandma Josie died, she left her Bible with her oldest daughter, Rose. Before Rose passed away several years ago, she gave Grandma Josie’s Bible along with some of her library to my father. It is a precious piece of family history, but more than that it is a constant reminder of God’s faithfulness. God accomplished His purpose for our pioneer family by protecting His Word, and He assured me He will accomplish His purpose in my life, too.



Grandma Josie (right) stands with her sister, Rosalia (left), just before the girls moved to McKenzie County, North Dakota.

Josie M. Burns is completing her studies at Andrews University in English, Communication and French, and she works at Lakeland Hospital as a psychiatric therapist assistant.